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Communications Office
Office of the President and Vice President

Michele J. Crank

Mihio Manus

928.871.7000

PRESIDENT BEGAYE SAID PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES NEED TO HONOR OUR TREATIES AND UPHOLD OUR SOVEREIGNTY

TWIN ARROWS-When Democratic Presidential candidate and U.S. Senator for Vermont, Bernie Sanders arrived yesterday at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino and Resort, the first person he met with was Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye.

The Presidential candidate held a Town Hall Meeting at Twin Arrows on Thursday, Mar. 17.

President Begaye welcomed and received Senator Sanders gifting him a chief's robe and a Navajo Nation flag upon arrival. The leaders exchanged handshakes and Sanders thanked President Begaye for welcoming him to the Navajo Nation.

The line to attend the Town Hall Meeting stretched from the casino lobby out and around the southern parking lots. Official count placed total attendance at 2,800.

Although the facility couldn't accommodate the waiting masses, it should be noted that Sanders chose the Navajo casino among many other venues in Northern Arizona to host his meeting.

President Begaye was able to meet one-on-one with Sanders before the rally, during which time he emphasized the need for a cabinet level Native American office that would serve as a direct connection to the president. He told Senator Sanders that this office would serve all Native American tribes and impact issues they face throughout the entire federal government.

"We're a treaty tribe and we want the President to continue to honor the provisions in our treaty," President Begaye said. "We want to continue dialogue in a government-to-government relationship."

The President also afforded time to address the crowd before the senator took to the podium.

"We need a candidate that will work with us on a Nation-to-Nation basis because we are sovereign nations. We need a candidate that will honor the treaties and uphold the treaty obligations that the Federal Government has to Indian Nations," he said.

The president emphasized the importance of protecting and revi-



Left to right: Veterans Liaison for OPVP, Jamescita Peshlakai, Democratic Presidential Candidate, Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT), Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprises CEO Derrick Watchman display the Navajo Nation Flag that was gifted to Senator Sanders during the Twin Arrows Town Hall meeting.



Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye shakes hands with Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) as he arrives at Twin Arrows.

talizing indigenous languages, Native American cultures and also traditional religions.

"We want candidates to uphold the sacred belief of being able to speak your own language as every language is sacred. Our Na-

vajo language won a war. I want you to know that," he said. "Our Navajo Code Talkers are iconic and the fact that that they won the war, shows that we need to honor every language in the U.S. because we are all Americans."

President Begaye was joined on stage by the CEO of Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise, Derrick Watchman and also the Vice President of Leupp Chapter, Kevin Todacheenie. Todacheenie delivered the opening invocation.

"We always begin these events with a prayer," said the president. "We need a leader that respects the creator."

As Senator Sanders spoke during the Town Hall Meeting, it was apparent that he was listening to the issues that President Begaye had brought forth.

"There is simply no debate that since day one the Native Americans have been lied to and cheated. They negotiated treaties that have been broken," Sanders said in his speech. "We owe the Native Americans so, so much and we are forever grateful that they have shared their culture and respect for the environment with us. We all know that the first Americans are the Native Americans."

Sanders went on to say that the U.S. Government has the responsibility to ensure equal opportunity to all citizens in the United States, especially the Native Americans.

"Let's be honest and say we that have not done this today," he said.

During the Town Hall meeting, Sanders addressed Native American poverty levels, suicide rates, high school graduation rates, crimes against Native American women and under funded Native American programs.

"As a nation we need to increase tribal sovereignty and honor tribal jurisdiction to prosecute criminal acts done on Indian land regardless of race of perpetrator. We need a major investment into Native American housing and to recommit the federal government to honor the treaties. We also need to provide senior level tribal entitles access to federal leadership. Washington should not act on behalf of the tribes without being in coordination with them."

Sanders promoted the federal government's responsibility to protect Native American cultures.

"We need to protect and revitalize indigenous languages, religions, culture and traditions. These cultures are so rich that we will prosper from this," he said.

President Begaye has yet to officially endorse a Presidential candidate but has firmly stated that he will meet with any candidate that will take the time to address issues facing Native American communities. The president sees these issues as being critical to any Presidential administration.

"We need a President who understands how Indian Nations are put together and set up and they need to respect this," he said.

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